

# Conversion & Christian Experience of the Rev. Bonomali Mozundar

## An Autobiographical Sketch by a Native Pastor in India

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY BISHOP WARNE.

I have worked side by side with Bonomali Mozundar for ten years and trust him in all particulars as I do my American brethren. Brother Mozundar is a good representative of our best educated and most efficient native ministers in our Indian Mission. The story of his conversion, suffering sacrifice and service, as told in this article by himself, at my request, is typical of many of our Indian ministers. His suggestions as to the way India is moving toward Jesus Christ, the superiority of the Christian religion over all other religions, and the needs of our Mission in India are worthy of most careful consideration by the whole Church as coming from one of the purest men, clearest and strongest thinkers of our Indian Church.

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# Conversion and Christian Experience of Rev. Bonomali Mozundar.

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(TOLD BY HIMSELF.)

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I was born in the year 1858 A. D., in the distinguished Mozundar family of Joka, in the District of Jessore, in Bengal. My father, late Haro Govinda Mozundar, was a high officer of a Rajah. He was very fond of worshipping idols and performed daily ceremonies. The Mozundar family is a large one in the village and was prosperous during the Mohammedan rule. Rent-free land and the remains of ancient walls and temples speak loudly of the grandeur of former days. By caste the Mozundar family is Kayastha (a very high caste) and of the Hindu religion. Being born in this family, I was nurtured and trained up a strict Hindu from my birth.

My father died when I was seven years old. A year after my mother's eldest sister took me to her own home at Astamanisha village, in the District of Pubna. My aunt was a Hindu widow, very fond of performing religious observances and pilgrimages, and had gone to distant parts of the country. She was childless and looked upon me as her own son; she entertained me as such, making me heir to whatever she had. She was a rigid Hindu and made me like herself from my infancy.

When I was fourteen years old she had me initiated into the Hindu faith by Sita Nath Goswami, the famous pilgrim of Brindavan, after which I performed the daily observances

with great assiduity. At this time I was learning in a village 'Hindu school, and in leisure hours I used to read the *Ramayan* (Hindu religious book) to my aunt and others.

Finishing the village school course, I went to the Rajshahi District. Here, in the appointed course of study, I had to read geography and natural philosophy. I was taught according to the Hindu *Puran* (Hindu religious book) that the earth rested on the head of a snake, and when it shook its head earthquakes took place, but now I know the notion was false. Formerly I believed the monster Rahoo (one of the Hindus' gods) swallowed the sun and the moon, causing thereby the eclipses of the sun and moon. When I read these anti-Puranic accounts, which, however, were thoroughly explained to my satisfaction by my teachers, doubt against the Hindu religion arose in my mind. At this time the light of truth began to enter into my mind, and I came to feel by and by that the Hindu caste distinction and worship and the Puranic accounts were senseless and against the dictates of conscience.

Thus in doubt and restlessness I spent the first eighteen years of my life. There was then no peace in my mind; it tended to asceticism. I determined *to search the truth and embrace it in what religion soever it should be found and spend my life religiously*. I must acknowledge this told seriously upon my scholastic course. Then, leaving Rajshahi, I went home to Jessore. At a time when I was sitting in the verandah, a youth of my age, and distantly related, who knew I liked to read

religious books, threw to me a tract and said, "Here, take what you are searching for." The name of the tract was *Hindu Dharma Bimordan* (exposure of the Hindu religion), published by the Calcutta Christian Tract Book Society. I read it throughout with great attention and found that the character of Hindu gods and goddesses was most hateful. In my mind I renounced the Hindu faith from that day.



A year after this I went from home to Pubna. There I expressed my mind to some friends. They also opened their minds to me and said, "Friend, we also have no faith in the Hindu religion." They advised me to embrace the Brahmo Somaj faith and gave me a *Brahmo Book of Prayer*. I acted as advised by them, but felt no happiness or peace in my mind. When I read *Hindu Dharma Bimordan* (exposure of the Hindu religion), alluded to above, informing me of the wickedness of the character of Hindu gods and goddesses, I came to know that it was written by some Christian—a Christian—nor did I know anything about his religion. In my boyhood I simply heard the name "Christian," as a relative of mine had embraced the Christian faith. This relative I never saw before, but after reading that book a strong desire arose in my mind that I should see him and ask what Christianity is; what had he found in it, so that, leaving all, he had embraced it, and if I found any trace of truth in it I also should embrace it.

So resolving, I dared walk fifty miles to the house of that Christian relative all alone and in the hottest part of the year—a painful two days' journey. Finding the convert-relative, I opened my mind to him. He said: "Your object is laudable, but you are a young man. Will you be able to leave all for the sake of religion and undergo privation and suffer difficulties and disgrace?" I said: "Yes, I am firmly resolved to embrace that religion which will stand to proof and conscience and will satisfy my hunger and thirst. I will then not mind what may happen to me."

Seeing my eagerness and resolution, he first explained to me the imperfectness of the Brahmo creed. It cannot show forth the justice and mercy of God, consequently it cannot save a sinner. Then he explained the life of Christ, how that by His holy incarnation and death on the cross the justice and the mercy of God met together and a full propitiation for our sins has been made. I stopped with him for about a week. Though in my mind I renounced Hinduism, yet I did not at once abandon all its customs.

At our parting the Christian relative provided me with a copy of the New Testament and a copy of Psalms of David, advising me to study them diligently. Coming home, I paid devout attention to their reading. The more I read, the more I liked to read. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you."—Matt. v : 44. "Shew me thy way, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy

truth and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the days."—Psalm xxv: 4, 5. "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."—Psalm li: 1, 2. These became the constant prayer of my heart.



Thus living in Hindu society, I studied the life of Christ in secret and believed He was an uncommon man, but failed to understand that he was an incarnation of God Himself. I therefore went again to that Christian relative of mine. He showed me from the life of Christ His power of performing miracles and His sinless character, telling me: "In the world there are lives of many great men, but in the life of none will you find these two together. Had Jesus Christ not been incarnate such could not be the case." Then he explained to me from the Prophets the expiatory death and the mediatorship of Christ, especially that part of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah where it is written, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." From this passage he explained that, for the expiation of the sins of the world, Jesus had to undergo death. He further said, "It is written in the *Rig Veda* (Hindu religious book) of the Hindus that Prajapati would, for his subjects, offer himself as a sacrifice, and

Jesus Christ was that Prajapati." This was very gratifying to me; I felt a strong faith in Jesus Christ. The passages—"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."—Matt. xi : 28-30. I felt sweet as honey, and my heart danced as it were in joy.

I returned home again from that relative. Oh, the state of my mind at that time! Dreadful fighting went on in my mind. The thoughts: "How shall I renounce caste-honor? How shall I leave paternal home and estates? How shall I make my old mother and aunt weep for me, and how shall I leave my only brother?" were very painful indeed. Then I thought of cutting a middle way; I would live, I thought, among the Hindus and serve Jesus Christ in secret. Then immediately came into my mind the words of our Saviour: "He who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven."—Matt. x : 32, 33. These words of our Saviour engendered fear in my mind. Thus in internal strife one year passed by. The leaving behind of estate was comparatively easier than leaving mother, aunt and an only brother. Then I found consolation in prayer to God, on whom I left the whole burden of my thoughts, and determined



to make public confession by receiving Christian baptism.



Determining thus, I bade adieu to the Hindu community and Hindu relations forever. All alone I walked over fifty miles again, in order to go to the relative alluded to. Oh, the number of tears I shed and the train of painful thoughts as I walked! After much trouble of body and mind I reached my destination, the house of the relative. To him I expressed my desire. He was exceedingly glad and with expression of great affection and kindness received me and began to impart religious instructions. By the power of the instructions received, and the high example of Christian life seen, I began to make continued progress in Christian life.

Thus after one month I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost in the evening service on Sunday, the 30th of May, 1880, in the church at Gopalgunge, in Faridpore District, in East Bengal, by the native missionary, Rev. Mathura Nath Bose, B.A., B.L. He is the very missionary to whom allusion has been made as my "Christian relative." He also, like me, had renounced the Hindu faith and embraced Christianity. At this time I nearly completed twenty-two years of age. After baptism I wrote to my Hindu friends and relations of the step I had taken, together with the reasons therefor. They were extremely sorry and angry with me. My mother and aunt came to me and said, weeping: "Son, come home. Do not say you have

become a Christian; say you have been living with a relative." This request, however, I was unable to fulfill.

After some months I went home. My friends and relations of the village dealt with me severely and insulted me. They permitted me to stop in the verandah of an out-house. There I had to eat out of a plantain leaf and clean the place with my own hands. Thus in silence I underwent all the insults. Some time after this there was a meeting consisting of my own relations, neighboring gentlemen and some Brahmin Pandits. They sent for me and said: "By embracing the Christian religion you have done wrong, and we are much afflicted. You should renounce that creed; then, by making expiation, we will take you back." I said in reply, "If you can show me that I have done wrong by so doing then I will hear you, otherwise not."

Then a Brahmin said from the assembly, "Why, leaving Hinduism, you became a Christian?" Though a neophyte, I said meekly: "The character of Hindu gods and goddesses whom we worship is so immoral and hateful that I cannot express it before this assembly. How can a sinner obtain salvation and remission of sins by worshipping them?" None dare come forward in defence of the purity of Hindu divinity, but were all out of temper and told me roughly, "You caste-destroyer and family disgrace, away from here; you shall never be allowed to enter the door again." The Lord Jesus hath said, "Ye shall be hated of all for my name's sake." This contributed much to my comfort. I

could not stop at home for the persecution that followed. I went again to that Christian relative. Thus was I exposed to persecution for eight years, but the persecution abated continually as they saw my patience and steadfastness in the performance of my duties. Afterwards they raised no objection when I visited home once or twice during the year.

After baptism I thought within myself, "The religion that cost me so much but took away hunger and thirst I must preach to my countrymen." I did the work of a preacher in the Gopalgunge Mission for twelve years, helping government as an honorary magistrate and doing some other works in the educational line. Preaching the gospel became my daily spiritual food. The Word of God tasted very sweet. It was "sweeter than honey and honeycomb," as David the Psalmist experienced.

For more than twenty years I am serving the Lord Jesus Christ. He has removed from my heart the fear of death and has put instead of it peace. Now death is my way to heaven. I can dare say now, "O death, where is thy victory?" He hath granted me victory through my Lord Jesus Christ, who hath said, "And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."—Matt. xix : 29; and here I testify, the Lord hath indeed fulfilled His promise in me. True friend like Him I have none. In illness and sorrow, trouble and danger, trial and persecution, He has been with me and

has saved, supported and comforted me. In whatever direction I turn my eye I see nothing but His mercy and love. It is the only desire of my heart that to the end of my life I may serve Him and preach His gospel to my benighted countrymen.



Providentially I joined the Methodist Episcopal Mission from the 1st of January, 1892, and began to labor as a pastor of the Bengali Church at Dharamtala Street, in Calcutta. Methodist doctrines, mode of service, bearing testimony, led me to feel that I was entering into a glorious new life. In the course of events there was a revival meeting at Jhanjra, a place south of Calcutta, in April, 1894. I was present there. Our Presiding Elder (now Bishop), F. W. Warne, preached there on Pentecost or how the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples. Whilst hearing this sermon I felt a new power within me. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and knew to a certainty that my sins were forgiven, and that salvation of spirit and full pardon are granted in this life. I shall not forget that revival meeting to the end of my life. Hitherto I served the Lord as His bond slave, but now by the mercy of the Holy Spirit I got witness in my heart that "I was no longer a slave, but a son of God." Formerly what I considered as no failure now I consider as such, and by the power of the Spirit I succeed in driving them away. By His great mercy, the uncleanness of the heart gradually disappeared. Now I am trying to see God and make fair

progress in the way of perfection. I like to preach the gospel to the poor; therefore the Lord Jesus has employed me to do that work. From July of 1899 I have had the charge of Diamond Harbor Circuit, and I preach to the agriculturists, fishmongers and woodsellers; to teach their children I have opened *path-salas* (day-schools) and Sunday-schools at different places; to preach the gospel in villages and markets I have appointed preachers, and to sell the gospel I have employed colporteurs. To preach to the women I have not been able to do anything yet for want of money. The field is large and hopeful, but the number of workers is very small; therefore the preaching is not like what I should like to have it. I am in a position to say that India, day by day, is progressing towards Jesus Christ, and the time is fast approaching when all India will serve the Lord Jesus Christ.



There is need of many male and female workers in this great country, and my daily prayer is that the need be removed, and I firmly believe that in due time the Lord will send help.

The experience that I have had during my twenty years' service in the field of the Lord leads me to make the following suggestions for the spread of the gospel:

(1.) There is need of many such missionaries, native and foreign, as have been called by the Holy Ghost and are self-denying.

(2.) Female missionaries of like description are needed for the females.

(3.) For the children of the Church are

needed physical and mental development and higher education.

(4.) Opening greater number of *pathshalas* in villages for the children of low-caste people and unbelieving parents.

(5.) It is highly necessary to set up night schools for laborers and unbelieving young men.

It appears to my sober thinking that Christianity is needed for the people of this country for the following reasons:

(1.) Our country is caste ridden, and therefore unity, sympathy, fellowship and brotherly feeling are utterly lacking. To extinguish caste distinction and mutual hatred, and to establish unity and brotherly feeling, Christianity is the only effective instrument. It is further seen that English education is enabling people of different countries and languages to exchange thoughts, and it is by the power of English literature that the minds of Hindu youths are losing the hold of Hindu errors and superstitions. It is necessary that Christianity be spread in this country with English education. There are in this country antagonistic religions and gods and goddesses; it is therefore the fittest place for the introduction of Christianity, which is so full of love and sympathy. When all will embrace it there will be one God in India, one Saviour, one baptism and one Supper of the Lord. They will put their trust on one Saviour, like the people of Europe and America.

(2.) One can see from the government census that the Mohammedan population is increasing; still their degradation is obvious.

And the reason is that the character of the founder is reflected in them; they and their religion are far from being likened by other religionists in India. Wherefore it is not fit for either as regards morality or spirituality.

(3.) We see nowadays another religion called Brahmoism. A few of the educated Hindus of the Calcutta University are its members; none from the lower grades are seen. The religious books are principally in the Sanskrit, which is not understood by all. The principal books have been studied in schools for the last two thousand years, but in no way have they done any good in this country; errors and superstitions of India are as rampant to-day as ever, Brahmoism is the refuge of a few of the educated men in town. In villages, mountains, deserts, seacoasts and islands none hear anything about it. It has established no schools, dispensaries or orphanages and has done no good to the Garos, Kukees, Veels, Santhals and other barbarous people, but Christianity is raising them to the level of the people of Great Britain and America. Wherefore it is plain that Christianity is *the* religion that is required for India.

(4.) There remains in the country among the Hindus a little of Buddhism, a religion established by Sakya Singha (Gautami). Its principal doctrine is "Absorption Salvation." The religion is known more or less to all the learned in the world. Here is a Buddhistic doctrine, "There is no heaven, Salvation, Spirit, next world, caste, refuge, and no fruit of works, sinful or righteous." It is plainly seen that the introduction of such a creed into

the country will make the people infidel. With the vanishment of sin, righteousness, next world, etc., will vanish wisdom, fear of God, etc. Consequently human society, in the absence of religion and morality, will be turned into a society of beasts.



In conclusion, I must say that of all the books that are studied in India for morality and religion the Bible is the most suitable. In fact, Christianity and the knowledge of God, of the world to come, and of sin and righteousness, are the only means that would make the people of this country happy and prosperous in this world and acceptable in the world to come.